



## **Quesnel Women's Resource Centre**

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Submission to the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

Quesnel Women's Resource Centre Collective

Quesnel, like many communities throughout our province and country, is home to too many missing and murdered women. Our Women's Resource Centre works with the families of these women, and in some circumstances has worked with the women themselves. Our Women's Centre houses the Stopping the Violence Counselling Program as well as the Stopping the Violence Outreach Program. Other services that the Quesnel Women's Centre offer include a Drop In Support and Education Program, a 24 hour Sexual Assault Response Line, a women's health clinic, and women's support groups. Our Women's Centre serves nearly 2000 women annually. Almost every one of these women has experienced some form of violence in her lifetime.

Violence against women is one of the most widespread and socially tolerated human rights violations facing women today. One in three women will experience violence in her lifetime. Between 2000 and 2006, 101 Canadian Soldiers and Police Officers lost their lives in the line of duty. The loss of their lives is tragic. We mourn and honour these men and women widely, through the media, and within our communities. During the same time period, over 500 Canadian women were shot, stabbed, strangled or beaten to death due to intimate partner violence. The most tragic piece of this is that violence against women is so widespread and common it seldom makes the front page of the newspaper. We have become desensitized when it comes to violence against women. Each year, thousands upon thousands of women survive acts of violence in Canada. BC is the leader in missing and murdered Aboriginal women. The native Women's Association of Canada

reports that an estimated 580 Aboriginal women are missing or have been murdered in our country. This is an epidemic and it is unacceptable.

When a woman contemplates leaving an abusive relationship, she is faced with multiple barriers and obstacles should she decide to leave. She is up against a system that takes careful navigation and that is often unsupportive of women. Following is a list that demonstrates some of the barriers we often see women facing when they access our services:

- ❖ Lack of or no access to safe, affordable housing or to second stage housing
- ❖ Lack of access to legal support and information
- ❖ Long wait periods within the judicial system keeping women and children at risk of their abusive partner
- ❖ Limitations within transition houses for working with and accommodating women with multiple issues such as violence, mental illness or addictions
- ❖ Barriers to accessing financial aid services such as guidelines around eligibility and having to call 1-800 numbers for information – less access to in person, local assistance
- ❖ Lack of access to liveable wages, training, or post secondary education opportunities keeping women locked in the cycle of poverty
- ❖ Lack of access to childcare
- ❖ Transportation

One of the most difficult parts of working in this field is the constant struggle to attain funding to provide the services we do for women. Our Women's Centre has supported women who have experienced violence in our community for nearly 30 years. We have worked endlessly for the elimination of women's poverty and towards equality for all women. We work to raise awareness about all of these issues locally and abroad. In 2004, our Women's Centre, along with all Women's Centres across the province, lost its core funding. We have watched our provincial government cut funding to Status of Women Canada and saw the closure of their offices across the country; and we witnessed the elimination of the Ministry for Women's Equality. During last years budget update, the government threatened a budget cut of 1.2 million dollars to anti-violence programs across the country. This would have devastated our programs as most

of us are already fundraising and seeking out other sources of funding to supplement our programs for funding shortfalls. Women and children count on these services. Until our government and legislative leaders take violence against women seriously and implement policies that reflect the needs of all women, gender inequality will continue to be the root cause of criminal violence against women.

Recommendations:

- ❖ That funding be fully restored to Status of Women Canada and other women's advocacy groups such as Women's Centres
- ❖ Reinstate the Ministry of Women's Equality
- ❖ That additional funding is allocated to anti-violence programs and services across BC. Anti-violence programs such as STV counselling, STV outreach, victim services, and transition houses need more resources to properly serve the increasing number of women accessing these services. Investment in training funds for anti-violence programs to better serve women with multiple issues and barriers. Consider offsetting the costs of these programs by fining abusive men
- ❖ Invest in programs geared towards prevention of violence against women
- ❖ Invest in safe affordable housing, and second stage housing
- ❖ Provide better access to legal aid representation, services and information
- ❖ Review income assistance eligibility guidelines for women leaving abusive relationships and create easier access to financial aid and personnel so that women are not forced to return to abusive situations due to economic reasons
- ❖ Implement legislation (with adequate funding) for universal daycare and provide women with opportunities to earn a liveable income and escape abusive situations
- ❖ Create a cross-sectored, best practices approach for all institutions working with abused women such as MCFD, RCMP, Crown Council, Health Care, Legal Services, and the judicial system. This should be advised by experts in the field such as the Ending Violence Association and Native Women's Association of Canada
- ❖ Require RCMP, prosecutors, judges and justices of the peace to have an understanding of domestic violence, power imbalances, and particularly the elevated danger women face upon leaving an abusive relationship
- ❖ Create policy that directs courts to consider the impact of domestic violence on children when custody and access are being determined.

- ❖ Invest in transportation options for women; especially in rural isolated communities
- ❖ Create a provincial sexual assault policy/protocol
- ❖ Hand down severe penalties for men who abuse women. Domestic violence laws should be gender specific, not gender neutral, because by a wide margin women are the ones who end up in the hospital or in a grave
- ❖ Recruit more Aboriginal Policing Officers
- ❖ Create a “Communication Policy” for RCMP to follow when working with families of missing or murdered women. Families often feel there is a lack of communication with RCMP in regards to their loved ones cases
- ❖ Educate Crown Council on violence against women. Too often Crown refuses to move forward with charges. This needs to be reviewed